Teaching is crucial for supporting students’ chances of success in higher education, yet often makes limited use of theory to foster contextualized, systemic understandings of access and success. Theorized yet practical ways of empowering university educators are needed to develop their practices and turn access into success for their students. This book harnesses Legitimation Code Theory ‘LCT’ to inspire university educators to understand, reimagine and create socially just teaching and learning practices. Chapters bring this powerful theory to bear on real-world examples of curriculum design, inclusive practices, cumulative learning, assessment practices, and reflection. Each chapter guides the reader through these cutting-edge ideas, illustrates how they can make real differences in practice, and sets out ways of thinking that educators integrate those ideas into practice. The outcomes will help students access the powerful knowledge and ways of knowing they need for success in higher education.

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TURNING ACCESS INTO SUCCESS

Improving University Education with Legitimation Code Theory

Sherran Clarence
For my mum, Jeanette
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I wrote this book for two main reasons. The first is that I found, in the writing I did following the completion of my PhD in 2014, that what I really wanted to say to educators was going to take a larger amount of space than a paper (or three) could provide. I needed to make a more complex, connected argument about enabling socially just teaching and learning and this book made that possible. The second reason is that I have found, in my own teaching and in the work I have done with colleagues in staff and student academic development, that the theories I have chosen to use in this work have been helpful and empowering. These theories, especially, have been the inspiration and enabler of change, growth and improvement in the educational environments I have been part of thus far. I wanted to share what I have learned because I believe it could help readers think about themselves, their context and their students in ways that can open up more critical conversations about what higher education really needs to do to widen student success.

I have been working in higher education for almost twenty years now, primarily in academic support and development. When I started out as a postgraduate and then professional tutor, I had no larger frameworks to draw on to think about, reflect on or understand what my students or I were doing (or where and why things were going awry). I fell back onto a great deal of what I critique in this book: an individualized notion of success and the idea that my students needed to try harder, work smarter and be better prepared for university. I considered myself a hard-working, committed teacher; I cared about my students and genuinely wanted all of them to do well.

But not all of them did well, and I wonder sometimes if I inadvertently hindered the success of some of my students, especially those already at a systemic disadvantage relative to their peers from supportive, well-resourced backgrounds. I wonder if my feedback, for example, while intending to helping them write better assignments, actually confused them because it assumed they could understand and act on my
advice without struggle. I wonder if my classroom engagement and activities also assumed the ability of students to participate in the same kinds of ways, not accounting for diversity in how they made sense of their learning.

Reflecting on this early teaching practice now, I can see there were two main constraints on my ability to create and enact better, forward-looking teaching and learning practice. First, I was teaching academic literacy and writing courses that were positioned adjacent to rather than embedded within the disciplinary writing and learning practices with which they aimed to assist students. Our materials and activities were decontextualized in terms of the knowledge that students read and wrote about and the formats or genres in which we asked them to write. In my modules there were few overt and specific connections between their disciplinary writing and the more general forms we worked with. This created gaps in their understanding, and also in students’ ability to enact the desired disciplinary literacy and knowledge practices in their disciplinary assignments. This kind of teaching deepened the divide for many students between what was expected as successful academic learning and what they were able to do. This was, as you may imagine, a wider divide for working-class students from poorer or less resourced home and school backgrounds.

The second constraint on my teaching practice was that I was not formally or overtly encouraged by course coordinators or colleagues to use learning theory to develop a more coherent understanding of my own teaching practice as it related to students’ learning. I had a sense of what success looked like and what teaching and learning could be, but it was tacit and remained un-critiqued for several years. Without recourse to ways of connecting my practice to theory that could help me see differently what I was doing, my ability to become a more effective educator was constrained.

This all changed in 2009 when I began to work as the coordinator of a university writing centre in Cape Town. I realized I needed a theorized way of thinking about writing and literacy development and found my way to New Literacy Studies and academic literacies research. This was transformative, both professionally and personally. The critical work done in this field enabled me to develop a more systemic, less individualized perspective on learning and teaching. I was able to see and critique the ways in which my own prior work had contributed to the maintenance of an unequal status quo and the exclusion of many students from access to powerful knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing at university. This was not easy, but it was enormously empowering, both for me and for many of the colleagues I worked with during my time in the Writing Centre.

Working with theory enabled us to see and solve problems in ways that went beyond ‘common-sense’ and ad hoc approaches. We could develop a way of working that connected our approaches to learning with critical theory and with other colleagues and peers working in similar ways in other writing centres and academic development environments. We could connect individual students’ struggles with their written assignments to larger, theorized notions of recognizing and enabling successful writing in and across the disciplines. This approach
strengthened our ways of working and our sense of purpose as writing development practitioners, and it helped us to assist the students and lecturers who came to us in more contextually relevant and sustainable ways.

During this period I completed my PhD, which used a relatively new sociological framework called Legitimation Code Theory to analyze relations between teaching and knowledge-making practices in two academic disciplines. Legitimation Code Theory enabled me to theorize teaching, learning and writing in higher education in new and empowering ways, complementing the academic literacies theory that was already informing my work at this time. Specifically, using this theoretical framework and its practical ‘tools’ to critique and change my practice as an educator and an academic developer inspired me and helped me to inspire those I have been fortunate enough to work with in recent years.

I completed this book in June 2020, in the midst of learning how to teach online and how to support my own students and peers via tele-conferences, learning management systems, WhatsApp and email in new and previously under-explored ways. The world has changed, perhaps forever, and we are changed by the global crisis sparked by COVID-19. It has touched every part of our lives, personal and professional. Education at every level has been affected and the last few months have been overwhelming, exhausting and challenging for many educators and students. Yet, as much as this has been a really difficult time, we have been given opportunities to rethink and reimagine what teaching is, what learning is, and how to design teaching and learning that is more inclusive, creative, fit-for-purpose, and empowering for students and lecturers. It is my hope that this book will contribute to ongoing conversations about how to improve higher education teaching and learning, both in remote and contact forms.

I hope you will find the analysis and discussions in the chapters provocative, helpful, and informative. I hope that you will use this book creatively in your own teaching contexts, with peers and students, and that collectively we will continue to strive for more socially just, inclusive, successful educational practice within and across the contexts in which we work.

Sherran Clarence
Cape Town, June 2020
I am deeply grateful to several different groups and individuals for support, advice, feedback, and assistance over the last five years of writing and researching this book.

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1

CONTEXT IS KEY

Laying the foundations for ‘better’ teaching and learning practices

Being a university-based academic these days is hard work. Academic lecturers and researchers across higher education globally have many competing demands on their time and headspace. To be a successful academic you have to be a dedicated and well-prepared teacher, a productive and successfully published researcher, a competent and organized administrator, and an active contributor to your academic or professional community, at the very least. An ability to bid for and secure research funding and to supervise postgraduate students to completion can be added to this list in many contexts, as is sharing your research in the public domain through writing for newspapers or popular online publications, and speaking on television or the radio. You must attend meetings and spend time with students in and out of class, and write and read and think, and mark assignments, and travel to conferences, and so much more, as part and parcel of taking on this role. Many have to do this without the security of tenure. This can be all be overwhelming in and of itself, and this is without factoring in a personal life, which may well comprise several additionally demanding roles.

Teaching presents just as many challenges as it does rewards. I hear this from many lecturers I work with – I feel it myself as an academic – and within many current university environments this has become even harder work over the last few decades. Since at least the 1990s, many universities in the Global South, for example, have been increasing student enrolments. Starting earlier, in the 1970s and 1980s, universities in the Global North have also been growing (see Boquet, 1999; Lillis, 2001), shifting to ‘open admissions’ or ‘mass’ higher education (Trow, 1999). In both contexts this growth has led to changes in the composition of the student body: in addition to being bigger, student bodies are more linguistically, socioeconomically, culturally, ethnically and internationally diverse. This has created uncertainty for many lecturers, especially for those who have been teaching for a long time and who learned to teach at university before massification brought these changes. Even lecturers accustomed to larger
universities and diverse student groups may find it hard to manage challenges presented by both the larger classes and the students’ differing experiences of prior learning.

Teaching and learning at university is characterized by sets of practices, enacted between students, lecturers and, in many cases, also tutors. These practices that we create, see and experience are underpinned and shaped by deeper sets of values, beliefs, and ideologies. These assumptions are about the purpose and role of higher education in society and in relation to the economy, the nature of knowledge and being a knower, what success is and how it is achieved. These beliefs, values and ideologies are linked to broader trends or ways of thinking that dominate society. The ways in which society is structured shape what we do, how we act, what we think within our universities because these are part of society. Our graduates need to make economic and social contributions to society.

In recent decades, the most notable trends shaping societies and their universities across the Global North and South are neoliberal capitalism and related forms of massification, globalization, and governance. These exist alongside calls for greater social inclusion and social justice (see also Bottrell & Manathunga, 2018; Fataar, 2019; Quinn & Vorster, 2019). The first part of this chapter opens with the context for why this book has been written and why you need to read it. It then moves to consider these trends influencing higher education in large and small ways, specifically at how they inform and define success in higher education, and what this means for the development of better teaching and learning practices. The final part outlines how the book is structured, how to approach it as a reader, and details what you can expect to find in the book.

Towards ‘better’ teaching practice: why you need to read and use this book

Whether you have many years of experience or are new to teaching and lecturing in a university, whether you are tenured or working on contract, whether you have ten students or 500 students, you have the same moral and ethical responsibility: to do the best you can to enable the greatest number of your students to achieve meaningful success. As lecturers, curriculum designers, academic developers, tutors, we need to create the most enabling environments we can with all students in mind, and not just the previously privileged for whom higher education success used to be reserved. While we are not required to do all the work of helping students to become successful – they need to be actively working on developing their knowledge and ways of knowing too – we are certainly not exempt from asking and critically reflecting on crucial questions about what success is, how student learning needs to be enabled and enhanced, and how different structural factors create stumbling blocks for many students.

As lecturers, tutors and academic developers, we have relative power and agency to remove stumbling blocks, to challenge inequalities, and to design and enact teaching in different, more socially just, and more expansive ways. But we cannot
do this time-consuming, emotionally and mentally demanding work alone, and without powerful resources to assist us. In addition to colleagues and peers who share these goals, we need to use theorized and scholarly approaches to change teaching and learning in ways that are contextually relevant, but also connected across higher education systems and structures. In connecting with other researchers and practitioners outside of our own contexts around shared concerns and solutions, we can build knowledge about, challenge and reimagine our practices on a global level. We may well experience different realizations of the dominant trends shaping higher education, and society, around the world, and need to consider these carefully in how we write our curricula, engage with our students, and enable successful achievement. But in spite of contextual differences, these trends also connect us together, and these connections can enable us to share knowledge and contribute across borders to more robust conversations about the purposes and practices of higher education.

In higher education studies as a field of research and practice there are many books, papers, websites and blogs devoted to teaching and learning practice, from curriculum design to teaching with technology to academic writing development. Many of these draw quite tacitly on theory to make their arguments and offer advice, and many present their arguments and advice as a form of common-sense, or practical wisdom. This has led to comments about the atheoretical nature of teaching and learning practice and research, including academic development work (Haggis, 2009; Manathunga, 2011; Quinn, 2012). Yet, there is theory that informs and shapes teaching and learning. A few of the main theoretical frameworks are cognitive learning theory, social learning theory, behavioural learning theory, and critical and social realist theory. The problem for many lecturers, who are specialists in their disciplinary knowledge and related ways of knowing, being and doing, is that much of the theory that informs educational research and practice is difficult to access, make sense of and use in practical, useful ways. In the field of higher education studies we use theory quite often to analyze teaching and explain what is, and is not, occurring in different contexts, but we seem to struggle to use theory to create better teaching and learning practice. In some instances, theory is even absent in the search for homogenizing ‘best’ practices that can provide a single, clear to answer to multiple, complex questions and challenges (Jacobs, 2019).

Although a great deal of research in higher education studies cited in the following chapters troubles the notion of finding or creating a one-size, homogenizing set of ‘best’ teaching practices that can apply across different disciplines, this idea remains a seductive one (Jacobs, 2019). As noted in the opening section, teaching is hard work and the work does not really get easier as our university and wider societal contexts continue to change. Finding a ‘best practice’ to apply and work with can seem like a relatively straightforward and manageable thing to do in the face of complexity and overwhelm. But the problem with this notion of one ‘best’ way of doing things is that it reinforces rather limited notions of success. It assumes that teaching and learning across quite different disciplinary, institutional and national contexts is similar enough for one set of assumptions to apply to all of them. This notion also assumes
that the basis for successful implementation rests with the lecturers and their students, absenting consideration of the different structures that enable or hinder this success. If the 'best practice' does not work, there tends to be a knee-jerk recourse to blame: students, for not working hard enough; lecturers, for not being sufficiently committed; the university, for not being well enough resourced or supportive. All this blame may feel justified, but it is not helpful, or constructive. It becomes a vicious cycle that undermines the probability of wider and deeper student success.

‘Access’ in this book is understood as Wally Morrow (2015) posited it: as ‘formal’ access to university places and spaces. You apply, you are offered a place, you take it up and you have access to the university and to all of its services and structures (i.e. the library, IT labs, sports grounds, social spaces, lecture venues, lecturers and so on). But, as Morrow (2015, p. 77) argued, formal access does not automatically grant students access to ‘the knowledge that the university distributes’. To achieve success, students need access to the knowledges that universities create, legitimate and distribute, and they need to further have the means to make sense of, use and also critique this knowledge. ‘Success’ is understood in this book as the ability to use higher education to transform yourself and your life project through ‘an intense engagement with [yourself], others and with disciplinary knowledge’ (Case, 2013, p. 135). Enabling success, and the enlargement of student agency – students’ abilities to grow, act and learn in personally and socially transformative ways – is at the heart of university education. This success cannot just be the expectation or reality for the ‘elite’ or for the relatively few who have already had ready access to well-resourced schools, educated parents and family members, libraries and computers; it has to become a reality for all students who are granted formal access to university spaces.

In keeping with this critical, nuanced understanding of success, and with a deeper framework that focuses on context as key to understanding student success and responsive teaching and learning practices, this book will seek to develop a notion of better teaching and learning practices. Here, ‘better’ implies ongoing reflection, theorized approaches to teaching and learning informed by a relational view of higher education’s contexts, purposes and goals, and a willingness on the part of both the system and the individuals within it to be open to critique and change. Context here does not just refer to where the students and lecturers come from and what kind of university they are working in. It also refers throughout this book to the disciplines that students and lecturers are working within, as well as the knowledges, skills and practices, and dispositions or aptitudes that students are required to develop and master. Throughout the book I will be referring to these aspects of teaching and learning as knowledge and ways of knowing, doing and being. These terms are open enough to encompass: skills, such as drawing an accurate vector diagram; practices, such as creating an expository argument; and dispositions and aptitudes, such as how we speak to one another, how we behave, act, dress and interact.

In making a contribution to theorizing and enacting better, more conscious teaching and learning practices in a range of higher education contexts, this book is
placed between alienating or inaccessible theory and atheoretical, homogenizing ‘tips and tricks’ and ‘best practices’. In the chapters that follow, I will explore global issues or challenges lecturers across higher education face in designing and enacting contextually responsive or relevant curricula (Chapters 2 and 3), enabling students’ *cumulative* learning and meaning-making in their specialized disciplines (Chapter 4), and planning and enacting assessment and evaluation in ways that further develop students, and lecturers, meaningful learning and growth (Chapters 5 and 6). All of these issues will be considered through the lens of critical social theories: Legitimation Code Theory and academic literacies theory. The goal in doing this is to show how useful and powerful theorizing your own teaching practice is and to introduce one theoretical framework that has proven useful in making sense of, doing and changing teaching and learning in higher education. My hope is that this will offer new and refined ways of thinking about your own educational practice.

Before considering how the book is structured and how to approach it as a reader, I would like to briefly expand on the ‘context’ mentioned in the title and to consider access and success more carefully in relation to the focus of the book as a whole.

**Troubling dominant notions of student success in higher education**

‘Massification’, a term many academics are familiar with now, was coined to describe the mass increase in enrolments across higher education contexts. In the first half of the twentieth century in European and other industrialized countries, higher education was considered an ‘elite’ occupation, available only to a small section of society (Mohamedbhai, 2014). With the growth of democracy globally in the latter half of the twentieth century, higher education opened up to greater portions of the population in these countries, shifting these systems from elite to mass provision of higher education, and in some cases (such as Brazil) to universal provision of higher education (see Trow, 1999). In essence, an elite system can be interpreted as being reserved for a talented and able few, a mass system sees higher education as a right for those who qualify to participate, and a universal system understands higher education as the society’s obligation to the people (Mohamedbhai, 2014). A key effect of shifts towards mass and universal systems is increased heterogeneity in student and also staff composition, in terms of gender, race, class, language, nationality, ethnicity and culture, as well as attendant changes to administrative and educational structures and practices.

Massification as a concept can speak to increased student numbers and it can be extended to consider the effects on university infrastructure, including physical spaces, staffing, physical and virtual resources, and teaching and learning (see Quinn & Vorster, 2019). Mass student enrolments meet two demands placed on higher education: the need for universities to play a greater role in meeting the demands of the knowledge economy for more ‘skilled’ workers; and the need for higher education to be democratized so as to enable access to its benefits for a wider cross-section of students, especially those previously excluded. The outcome of this is supposed to be an increase in social equity, enhanced life chances or social and economic mobility, and greater participation of these students in social and
economic life. This has, however, not been fully realized for reasons we will discuss a little further on and in the chapters that follow. This is linked to a disconnect between the espoused aims of democratized higher education systems and the kinds of outcomes that are actually enabled through the curriculum, teaching, assessment and engagement in wider campus life.

Universities are fundamentally social spaces. Public universities especially, as part of broader public culture, are powerful vehicles for the deepening and development of public participation and democratic citizenship (Giroux, 2002), a purpose which stands in contrast to corporate culture’s ‘neoliberal’ learning subject. The focus in this system, as Giroux indicates, is on the private individual, and on private, personal gains and successes. Coughlan (2006) argues that this belies the link between expanding access to higher education and democratizing it: in systems where this individualistic culture is influential, there is a profound disconnect between the goals of social justice and equitable student access and success and how universities actually make this real for all students. Significantly, this disconnect concerns knowledge: what kinds of knowledge students have access to, who this knowledge is for, how students are able to engage with and use this knowledge, and how knowledge is conceived as part of the ‘social justice’ or emancipatory purposes of higher education to begin with (Mavelli, 2014).

Rather than expanding the possibilities for genuine success, universities influenced by individualistic values tend to narrow in on an ‘ideal’ subject they want to create or produce. This notion of who the ‘University of X’ graduate is, or should be, may tacitly but profoundly inform the design, teaching and assessment of the curriculum, the primary vehicle through which access to knowledge and also ways of being a knower is facilitated. This ‘ideal’ subject is created through a narrowing of legitimate or valued forms of knowledge and attendant ways of knowing: some bodies, some ways of being, some knowledges, only some histories are accepted and reproduced, which means others are marginalized or actively repressed. Conforming is the path to success here rather than widening the possibilities for different ways of being and different knowledge(s) to be centred, or at least openly valued. Examples that point to pushback against this notion of success are student activism in the United States against Islamophobia and widespread racism on many university campuses (Al-Sharif & Pasque, 2016), and calls for decolonizing knowledge and curriculum and re-centring African subjectivities, knowledges and bodies in South Africa (Heleta, 2016).

To enable greater access to both the public goods of higher education and individualized notions of success, universities have been widening participation or formal access to diverse groups of students since the 1960s and 1970s, many from the working classes who were previously excluded from higher education. But many of the attendant discourses or practices of widening participation and enabling formal access have been couched in different forms of deficit thinking (see Archer, 2007; Smit, 2012). In essence, this means that students who are different from or do not conform to neoliberalism’s dominant ‘middle class, masculinized “rational” and strategizing subject’ position (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth, & Rose, 2013, p. 434) are marginalized until and unless they can conform to what the system regards as the ‘ideal’ student, consumer and citizen.
In this system, social inclusion is understood in narrow, non-democratic terms as compliance and passive conformity. You may see this playing out in your context as a conflation between access and inclusion: if students have places at the university and access to all of its services and benefits then they can be considered ‘included’ in the social of the university. However, we can see in rising student activism on campuses across the Global North and South that the ‘social’ of the university is not open to all; in both overt and more tacit ways, university cultures and structures continue to include those whose ways of being effectively cohere with what the university values and desires in a ‘successful’ graduate and exclude others, regardless of their ‘formal’ access. The role of teaching and learning against this backdrop may be cast as providing students with the accepted or recognized knowledges, skills and identities that will enable them to become successful members of society. But this may be a limited notion of this role if what we are really after is democratic, socially just higher education, and for students to have ‘not just skills to reproduce existing power structures, but knowledge to articulate a different vision of the future’ (Mavelli, 2014, p. 868).

Over the last two decades, corporate culture (Giroux, 2002) has become a growing influence in university governance and management across the Global North and South. Its values and beliefs are pervasive and are felt both overtly and tacitly in everything from the setting of admissions criteria and allocation of funding and resources, to curriculum design, teaching and assessment practices. This culture is underpinned by an autonomous model of the ideal student learner, characterized as highly motivated, self-regulated, independent, strategic and adaptable (Allen et al., 2013; Boughey & McKenna, 2016). To be a success in this system is to be motivated and hardworking, flexible and strategic, and make the most of whatever learning opportunities you are presented with.

The converse of this, of course, is that students who do not succeed within this system are cast as not properly motivated, independent and strategic, and thus not the ‘right’ university students. This is a significantly problematic set of beliefs and values for teaching and learning that aims to be just and inclusive; first, it fails to appreciate the importance of the social context in which students and lecturers co-exist within a university. Second, it is unable to see the ways in which the social context is marked by gendered, classed and racialized inequalities that give a lie to the simplistic equation that wider participation equals greater diversity and success (see Burke, 2013; Mavelli, 2014). Behind the supposed universal notion of the motivated, self-reliant, strategic and adaptable student may lie quite specific male, white, heteronormative and middle-class assumptions and world-views, views that are reinforced implicitly by the role-models that dominate many university spaces.

Universities are tasked with contributing to social, political, environmental and economic development through the education of skilled and knowledgeable graduates and the progressive creation of new knowledge (see Green, 1994). But what comprises the social in higher education, or in the societies it serves, is not homogenous or generic. Universities are made up of disciplines and fields of study and within these are different subject areas and foci, all of which together comprise
a heterogeneous ‘map’ of different ways of specializing both knowledge and those who know and use it. This means that, rather than being seen as a force that threatens the academic project and that should be tamed and managed, difference or diversity could actually be seen as a resource. Enabling meaningful social inclusion and social justice through education would then imply widening what counts as valid knowledge and valid ways of knowing and being, rather than limiting these to those which serve the narrow interests of society’s elite, consciously or unconsciously. Yet, this is almost impossible unless we understand and define what counts as *success* in a more expansive, critical and systemic manner than ‘neoliberal’ culture currently does.

One way in which notions of student success are currently being troubled and redefined is through recourse to theories of social justice that are able to explain the systemic, structural and historical nature of current injustices, marginalization and exclusion of certain bodies, ways of knowing and forms of knowledge. Social justice is hard to define in one sentence or a soundbite, as theorists and thinkers come at this concept from different perspectives depending on their disciplinary background and the problems they are thinking through using the concept. Nancy Fraser’s work is perhaps most useful, especially for the arguments made in this book: she understands social justice, and by the same turn, social injustice, as being systemic, structural, and institutionalized (see Fraser 1997; 2008).

Rather than locating the blame for social injustice or the onus for creating greater justice within individuals, Fraser (2008) argues that true social justice can only be created when we dismantle and recreate institutions that hinder the advancement of the many to elevate the few. Her approach helps us to think about and theorize the ways in which universities support approaches to teaching and learning that, either tacitly or overtly, are premised on deficit thinking about student learning and an individualized view of success as achieving the dominant, valued subject identity prized by neoliberal corporate culture (see Burke, 2013; 2015). Within our universities, we need to collectively be mindful of the dominant discourses and approaches to both access and success that those in positions of power use to shape what happens to students, as well as what is expected of lecturers and tutors. If we are unable or unwilling to see the deeper principles that organize the contexts in which we work, we are likely to support and further skewed versions of student success that privilege students who, by virtue of their race, class and gender at least, are already closer to being the ‘ideal’ student and the ‘ideal’ citizen (see also Luckett, 2016).

Practically speaking, we need theories of teaching and learning that can embrace a relational way of making sense of the university, the curriculum, and the point of higher education. Learning – the process of becoming a skilled, knowledgeable, transformed knower who can contribute meaningfully to both economic and social life – is both an individual and social process. Students do need to be responsible, independent and motivated to work hard and try new things. We all need to be these things when we are engaged in learning something new, and most of the knowledge and ways of knowing, doing and being that students encounter at
university are new. But what higher education tends to do – one could argue what it has always done – is to disconnect the individual from the social in terms of understanding how the latter may both enable and limit the development of the former.

I am underpinning the arguments made in the chapters that follow with a systemic view of social justice and equity that challenges the primacy of decontextualized individualism. This larger ideological framework creates a golden thread that runs through the chapters, linking the different arguments made about aspects of developing better teaching and learning practices. This is a choice I have made as a researcher and practitioner in response to the context in which I work, which is grappling with big questions about inclusion, exclusion and social justice in a higher education system marked by significant racial, gender and socioeconomic disparities. This is my context. Yours may be quite different and prompt different overarching concerns for you as an educator and researcher. Apart from these concerns with enabling more socially just educational praxis (theorized practice), what this book really wants to do is make that better practice possible in practical, effective ways through helping lecturers and academic developers consider, theorize, and do teaching and learning differently.

To this end, I have chosen to use a theoretical framework and set of ‘tools’ that can enable this work on two levels. Firstly, the framework I am using here – Legitimation Code Theory or LCT (see Maton, 2007; 2014; 2016) – has at heart a concern with these larger questions this section has pointed to: whose knowledge counts in higher education, in society and why? Who gets access to this knowledge and how? What kinds of meanings matter, and how are these made legitimate, or valued? But LCT is also a practical theory, in that the tools it provides can be – are being – used by lecturers and by students to make different aspects of learning and teaching more open for critique and change, more accessible and comprehensible, and more equitable. This makes LCT useful for the work this book is doing to contribute to current conversations in the field of higher education studies about improving teaching and learning in meaningful, actionable ways.

**LCT, a brief introduction**

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is a sociological framework influential in educational and social research and practice around the world. Scholars in diverse disciplines, such as Political Science, Jazz Studies, Engineering Sciences, English Studies and Biology, are finding the conceptual tools within the framework powerfully useful for exploring, understanding and addressing problems in educational and social contexts. Karl Maton began developing LCT during the late 1990s. He began by incorporating, connecting and building on ideas from, principally, Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein. Research and practice using concepts and insights from LCT is now part of educational and social contexts in many different countries (e.g., United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa). LCT has become both a theoretical framework and a diverse community of practice and scholarship.
LCT understands ‘knowledge as an object of study’ that, while socially created and used, is also ‘real’, in that it has ‘properties, powers and tendencies’ (Maton, 2014, pp. 9–10). This means that while knowledge is created by actors living and working within specific social and historical contexts, it cannot be reduced to those contexts or to the motivations and beliefs of those actors. What they give rise to has its own reality, in the sense of having effects. The forms of knowledge and related practices that we create in particular contexts have the ability to shape and influence those contexts and the actors within them (Maton, 2014, pp. 1–22). This is important to mention here because LCT is deeply concerned with questions of knowledge and knowers.

Much educational research in the past four or five decades has focused on a great deal on knowers – students especially – and how teaching can become more student-centred and responsive to students’ learning needs, goals and so on (Haggis, 2003; 2009). What LCT has sought to reclaim is knowledge – what differentiates and specializes different forms and kinds of knowledge and what makes these different forms and kinds powerful in specific contexts (e.g., university, professional practice, and so on). This is important for the research reflected in this book: what I want to help readers reflect on and improve in their own teaching and learning contexts requires a theorized understanding of the relationship between the knowledge students are learning and who and what they need to become and do in relation to that. In other words, how do students become physicists or lawyers or political analysts or designers, etc.?

The LCT framework comprises three active ‘dimensions’ or sets of concepts, each of which explores different set of organizing principles that underlie practices, beliefs and dispositions (Maton, 2014, p. 18). These dimensions – called Specialization, Semantics and Autonomy – enable researchers and practitioners to get at what lies beneath what is seen and experienced on the surface, for example, in a lecture, an assessment cycle, or in a curriculum. Analysis of these organizing principles can help reveal the ‘rules of the game’ or ‘ways of working, resources and forms of status’ within fields (Maton, 2014, p. 17). Each set of organizing principles is conceptualized through a species of legitimation code (specialization codes, semantic codes, autonomy codes).

The goal of the LCT framework as a whole is to offer us a way to see more effectively what we cannot with a common-sense or everyday set of understandings; it is a specialized theoretical apparatus concerned with exploring meaning-making and knowledge-building with different underpinning organizing principles, or orientations to meanings and knowledge. But we have different problems or concerns – different meanings – we want to understand, such as how to better teach abstracted concepts that do not have easy empirical references in the real world (see Blackie 2014, on teaching inorganic chemistry), or how to capture the ways in which musicians develop their knowledge, practice and aesthetic sense and share this with others (see Richardson, 2020, on jazz education). The problems we want to understand and solve may ask for different ‘tools’ or conceptual ways of working. So, we can use, for example, Semantics (Blackie, 2014) or Specialization (Richardson, 2020), a different dimension
(Vorster, 2020 using Autonomy), or a combination of two or more dimensions (Chapter 6, this volume).

The community of scholars and educators who enact LCT in their research and teaching are concerned with questions about *access*, *success*, and *social justice*. These concerns are at the heart of this book, and this, in addition to the practical and accessible nature of the LCT ‘toolkit’ of concepts and codes, is why I have chosen to use this approach. The kinds of questions driving the research reflected in the following chapters are: what knowledge counts as valuable or *legitimate* in different contexts (i.e. school, university, government, social movements, etc.)? How is that knowledge made legitimate, reproduced, and shared? Who gets access to what knowledge, where, and how? Further, why are some excluded from knowing while others are not? How do we make sense of the current ways of working with knowledge and knowers so that we can make changes where these are needed?

The two dimensions I shall use in this book are Specialization and Semantics. ‘Specialization’ focuses on what kinds of knowledge, and what kinds of knowers are created, valued and nurtured by educational practices (Maton, 2014; Maton & Chen, 2020). Chapters 2, 3 and 6 use concepts from this dimension to reveal the hidden principles underlying curriculum design and feedback-giving. ‘Semantics’ examines the context-dependence and complexity of practices and how education connects, relates and builds meanings in and across the curriculum (see Maton, 2014; 2020). Chapters 4, 5 and 6 use concepts from Semantics to examine teaching, assessment and feedback practices.

**Why we need stronger, explanatory theory in education**

White (2017) explains that theory has three characteristics: it is abstract, it is testable, and it is explanatory. In being all three of these things, theory enables us to create more powerful understandings of how the world works. Theory is powerful because it enables meanings to transcend single or local contexts and thus can be used or applied beyond the problems or challenges we are confronted with in the present. In teaching and learning, theorizing practice is linked to more sustainable, longer-term development and change, such that you can use the theory to improve not only the current module, task or teaching activity you are working on, but also future modules and further work with students and colleagues. To enable this dual empowerment, both immediate and longer-term, we need a theory that speaks to something deeper than only teaching or only learning. We need to dig down to what lies beneath the acts of teaching and learning, to ask ourselves what is the point of teaching; why and what and how do students need to learn?

The theory we then need to provide us with the ‘explanatory power’ (Maton, 2014) to create and enact better teaching and learning practice needs two dimensions. On the one hand, theory needs to be able to characterize *knowledge* as an object of research and practice as well as having subjective dimensions, as it is created in particular social and historical moments by human beings (see Bhaskar, 1998), thus making it variable over time. On the other hand, we need to be able to characterize the
processes and practices we use to create, make sense of, and use knowledge to become knowing subjects, or *knowers*. The theory or theories we need have to provide us with a language for naming and describing what counts as knowledge, who the valued knowers are, and why, in a particular context, at a particular time, we choose to value and develop *this* knowledge and *these* knowers over possible others. We also need the theory we use to show us how to design teaching and learning that genuinely provides all students with the means to acquire the valued knowledge and to become legitimate knowers, because this is the basis for success in higher education, and widening student success needs to be our collective goal.

One of the principal reasons LCT has been chosen as the ‘toolbox’ for the chapters that follow is that it enables this kind of theorizing and so moves us towards improved praxis. It can enable us to think from, for example, binary positions or states that tend to characterize teaching and learning development work (‘typologies’) towards a continuum or range of practices (‘topologies’). In essence, this means that LCT can take our thinking out of the many binary ‘boxes’ apparent in educational thinking, such as deep and surface approaches to teaching (Biggs, 2012; Marton & Säljö, 1976), high road and low road transfer (Salomon & Perkins, 1989), and active and passive learning, as implied in studies on inquiry-based learning, authentic learning and pedagogic constructivism (see Healey, 2005; Kotzee, 2010). Moreover, it can then enable us to consider and create different, creative options for practice and research. This is valuable in theorizing higher education practices with a view to creating better, more accessible teaching and learning practices, because so much of educational thinking and working is premised on binary thinking or putting our practices (and students) into boxes.

For example, surface approaches to processing information and knowledge (Marton and Säljö’s original work in the 1970s) has been transformed into deep or surface approaches to learning underpinned by educational psychology and individualized understandings of student learning (Haggis, 2003). Students who are deemed ‘surface learners’ are framed negatively as doing the wrong kinds of learning; the right kinds of learning being ‘deep learning’ and by extension, being deep learners. Apart from misrepresenting the original work in this area, in putting this onus on students to do the right kinds of learning rather than on higher education to provide appropriate forms of teaching, how does this way of thinking help us work out what is ‘deep’ and ‘surface’ about the learning in the first place? When you think, in your own context, of how you want students to process the knowledge, practices, ways of acting and so on in your subject or its larger discipline, what is ‘deep’ and what is ‘surface’ in what students are doing? I suspect what you might arrive at in considering a response is a way of characterizing how students show their level of specialism in the discipline, or their growing ability to act, write, read, think and speak like someone who belongs to the same community of disciplinary practice and knowledge you belong to. There may be both more and less ‘deep’ ways of developing this disciplinary identity, and students and lecturers will use different teaching and learning strategies in response to particular learning goals or outcomes at particular points in time.
To work out what these particular goals, outcomes and strategies could be, we need to see learning and becoming more as a continuum of meanings and positions. We also need to see what makes different forms of learning, teaching, knowledge and knowing special or particular, as well as what commonalities and differences they may share. Further, what counts as knowledge and knowing in different contexts also has to mean something in relation to both the specific, present context and beyond it so that the current learning and knowledge can be *cumulatively* added to and developed into the future. Context here can mean a range of different things, such as a module, a specific disciplinary subject, or a physical context, for example, a lab or a workplace-learning site. Meanings that are ‘powerful’ (Chapter 2) are those that can be used within specific knowledge and knower building contexts and have application or meaning beyond those contexts, so that they can be taken forward as part of a lifelong or ongoing learning process.

**How the book works**

The structure of the book is organized around teaching and learning as a ‘cycle’ broken into different interconnected steps or processes: designing a curriculum and writing or developing course materials (Chapters 2 and 3); classroom-based teaching and interaction with students (Chapter 4); designing and discussing assessment tasks (Chapter 5), and working with feedback and evaluation (Chapter 6). Within different national and local contexts, there are particular challenges that shape the conditions academic lecturers and academic developers work within, and the issues they need to manage and make sense of as they work on different parts of the teaching and learning cycle. However, although context is key and what counts as a priority challenge will differ between local, regional and national higher education institutions and sectors, the challenges this book discusses, theorizes and aims to offer responses to are common to university lecturers and academic developers across these differences.

This book is not a textbook. It has not been written to provide the definitive word on successful teaching practice or to claim that there is one theory or one approach to improving your own teaching and learning practice within your context. As the opening sections note, context is important and the different trends that are currently influential in higher education will shape your context in different ways. This means that you need to be aware of your own national, institutional and disciplinary concerns, structures, cultures and resources, and work out as you read the chapters what the more pressing issues are in teaching and learning that you need to reflect on, theorize and change. These may be closely mirrored in the discussions in the chapters because the challenges discussed in the book are relatively well known to many university lecturers across different higher education sectors. Yet, even if they are not, the book has been written as a sourcebook, so that you can use it to think about what matters most to you and your students at the point in time at which you read (and re-read) it. You may come back to some of these chapters later on in your academic career and find new points to focus on and think about.
This book can be navigated in one of two ways: you can read it chronologically, chapter by chapter. If you do this you may notice some repetition of the LCT tools and of aspects of the teaching and learning challenges the book tackles. This is because the book has been written in such a way that you can also dip in and out of it, reading the chapters out of order or only reading those which are of most interest to you right now. Tools from the LCT framework are introduced in the chapters in which they are used in analysis, rather than in a separate theory chapter. However, while the theory is made sense of through a specific analysis, it is also introduced in more context-independent terms. This will hopefully make it possible for you to work out how to apply and use the theory in your context if your problem is different from the one represented in the selected data. Each chapter has its own self-contained argument, although, as I indicated earlier, the central thread of socially just, systemic understandings of enabling success runs through the book, connecting the chapter arguments together.

I hope that, however you choose to navigate the book, you will use it, because it is written to be a source both of inspiration for improving teaching and learning practice, and as an account of theoretically powerful approaches to unpacking, making new sense of and changing practice.

Overview of the chapters in the book

Chapter 2 opens the exploration of teaching and learning practices by starting with the relationship within the disciplines between knowledge and knowers. This chapter draws out the discourse of ‘employability’ that many universities around the world are grappling with. One of the effects of this discourse has been the development of sets of generic skills and attributes that all lecturers are asked to incorporate into their curricula, teaching activities and assessment tasks and assignments. Yet, many struggle to work out how to do this because to make meaning of these generic aspects of becoming employable (as understood by this discourse), there needs to be a valid contextualization within the specialized body of knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing within the disciplines.

If the knowledge we come to university to acquire is powerful because it is specialized, then the ways in which we come to know it, use it and make it part of our identities needs to be specialized too. Using tools for theorizing different expressions of what makes knowledge and knowers special and also valid, this chapter shows you how to uncover, theorize and express your own discipline’s basis for legitimate or valid achievement and success. Being able to see, name and explain this to yourself can help you to reflect on the learning outcomes you have created for your modules, the alignment of these with both the discipline’s underlying organizing principles, as well as with the teaching and assessment activities designed for students.

Building on Chapter 2’s exploration of disciplinary organizing principles expressed as specialization codes, Chapter 3 poses a different question about knowledge and knowers. While it is important to understand the nature of knowledge and what it is to be a knower to enable students to achieve success. Teaching and learning cannot stop here. It is also vital to consider the extent to which our
dominant and valued practices are, in fact, reinforcing exclusive, limited participation in higher education and in society through valuing and reproducing knowledges and knowers that maintain inequitable statuses quo, rather than challenging these. Using a different ‘tool’, this chapter looks at how curricula are designed through the choices lecturers and curriculum designers make about what the valid basis for success is, and what it is not. The analysis here shows you how the deeper logics and organizing principles of your own curriculum can be uncovered, theorized and reimagined to create genuine spaces for socially just teaching and learning.

Moving a step onward in the teaching and learning cycle, Chapter 4 tackles the tricky topic of how to enable ‘joined-up’ or cumulative learning and knowledge-making. In essence, this chapter begins with a problem many lecturers grapple with: the tendency many students have to break their knowledge and related knowing, doing and being practices into pieces, often aligned with learning for tests or completing assignments. The most common result of this segmentation of the whole of meaning captured within a curriculum is that students’ ultimate transformation into different kinds of skilled, knowledgeable, professional graduates may be undermined. This is echoed in comments across industry in different countries about graduates lacking, particularly, forms of professionalism or valued ways of acting in and adapting to working environments.

Rather than addressing these complaints with generic graduate attributes, Chapter 4 argues for teaching to create clearer, meaningful connections between parts of the curriculum (units or topics), between different modules within a degree programme, and between academic and related professional or vocational contexts students will eventually move into. This chapter uses tools from Semantics to help you theorize the ways in which knowledge and learning are both contextualized and abstracted from context. It demonstrates how successful learning is about meaning-making that connects knowledge with ways of knowing, doing and being to create a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

Chapter 5 continues working with Semantics tools to look closely at assessment practices. Specifically, the chapter looks critically at the false divide created in many universities between ‘content’ and ‘skills’, which can lead to generic, decontextualized approaches to teaching students critical, disciplinary ways of presenting, writing about and creating knowledge. This chapter uses examples of assessment tasks from the natural and social sciences to unpack the ways in which students’ thinking and writing work in response to assignments is specialized by the knowledge they are working with, as well as by the ways of knowing, doing and being that specialize knowers in the discipline. The argument here is that, whether they are able to do so on their own or are able to work with academic developers, disciplinary lecturers need to make the ways of thinking and writing about knowledge an overt part of their curriculum and teaching practice. This chapter shows you how to develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of success for your students as related to the successful acquisition and enactment of their disciplinary literacy practices.

The final substantive chapter, Chapter 6, closes the teaching and learning cycle by looking at feedback to students on assessment tasks and assignments, and
evaluation of teaching by students. This chapter argues that, if framed by narrower or unconscious notions of ‘ideal’ ways of expressing a disciplinary identity or of being a successful student, feedback can serve to reinforce narrower, individualistic notions of success. In doing so, feedback practices can actually further exclude students who do not see or realize the ‘rules of the game’ from understanding how to improve their learning and become successful knowers.

Evaluation, as a form of feedback to lecturers from their students, can also reinforce both generic notions of successful teaching and an individualized notion of teaching success. In the first instance, evaluation can reinforce generic notions of successful teaching through asking questions that provide little information about learning and teaching in specific subjects and disciplines. These kinds of questions may provide basic data to show evidence of quality as compliance, but they are unable to show how the teaching has actually opened wider spaces for student participation, engagement and successful learning. In the second instance, generic evaluation data limits lecturers’ ability to critically reflect on and change their teaching practice. In providing a thin account of general student satisfaction (or unhappiness), it isolates the lecturer from a consideration of the structures supporting (or discouraging) them in their daily student-facing work.

Using tools introduced in the previous four chapters, this chapter will consider feedback to students both in relation to the specialized learning outcomes students must successfully achieve and in relation to further learning. In terms of evaluation, it looks at how you could ask for feedback on your teaching that enable you to reflect both on the present module and teaching context and on your own ongoing development as a specialized knower and teacher in your discipline or field.

Chapter 7 is written in the style of an afterword of sorts – a closing ‘chapterette’. It pulls together the key threads that run through the book, introduced here in Chapter 1, to draw the book to a close. The larger thread is the ways in which current social, political and economic ideologies and trends may threaten more expansive, socially just and socially transformative enactments of higher education and teaching and learning practice. Sub-threads focus on: the need to see and theorize the individuals in higher education as part of complex social and socializing worlds within and outside of the university; the need for knowledge and knowers to be theorized in specialized rather than generic ways; and the value of theorizing learning and knowing in both context-dependent and context-independent ways that can be both more and less complex depending on the purpose of the teaching and learning and the disciplinary context itself.

A final thread that the book pulls through the chapters that follow is the need for us, collectively, to have hope for change and the courage to make change possible. We can begin to unpack our practices with a view towards transforming them, using a set of theoretical tools that can provide us with a sophisticated yet also accessible, practical language with which to talk about knowledge and related ways of knowing, being and doing. This work, underpinned by a notion of social justice as requiring systemic, institutional change, is not easy or quick. But it is vital work to do in enabling higher education to realize its important civic, educational, and social purposes.
A brief glossary of sorts

We, us and our

I am an academic developer and a lecturer. My teaching and learning practices are constantly in revision as I find ways to do better and to work in more socially responsive, conscious, theoretically informed ways. At times in the following chapters, I may refer to ‘we’ or ‘us’ or ‘our’, and in doing so I am simply signalling that I do not stand apart from my readers, but consider the work I am proposing in each chapter my own work too.

Disciplines and subjects

I refer in the chapters mainly to disciplines as the organizing structures we reference in the teaching and learning cycle. This is because the discipline is the larger structure that socializes knowers and creates boundaries around what does and does not ‘count’ as valid knowledge. Subjects are the ways in which we unpack and access the discipline: think of the subjects of criminal law, civil law, constitutional law and tort (or delict) law all being part of the discipline of Law. While I acknowledge that there is complexity in how we define a ‘discipline’ at university or college level, I think it is safe to argue that there is a shared sense of this term and the term ‘subject’ in relation to it in spite of these additional meanings.

At certain points, I also use ‘subject’ to refer to people – we are subjects in the sense of being part of higher education as a system and subject to its rules, structures, practices and so on. Here, terms such as ‘subject position’ and ‘ideal subject’ are used to denote the identities we may take on, or resist, as we engage with and encounter different knowledges and different knowing others (peers, students, managers, etc.) within our university contexts.

Courses and modules

My understanding, based on my experience of working in several different universities in my own country and other countries is that the term ‘course’ relates most commonly to professional or academic development courses, such as a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education or a short course on assessment design or teaching with technology. The term ‘module’ typically refers to the building blocks of a curriculum; for example, in a first year History curriculum students may have to register for four modules, two in each semester. While the terminology may differ in your context, I am using these understandings of ‘course’ and ‘module’ in this book.

Units and topics

Within modules, the curriculum is often divided up into smaller pieces, usually dictated to some extent by the university calendar and how many weeks and lecture/
tutorial periods each lecturer has to use for the teaching and learning programme. These are variously called units or topics, such as week 1 in a module on South African History since 1900 might deal with the topic of the country becoming a union in 1910 and the implications of this for the black and white inhabitants of the country at the time. The next topic in week 2 may move to consider the progress from the union to the development of the apartheid ideology and so on, moving topic by topic or unit by unit towards present day.

Tasks and assignments

This book understands tasks more generally than assignments, as anything students are asked to do as part of the learning process. This can include informal, in-class tasks, such as talking to two peers about a specific question or issue and then reporting back or a short piece of written or performed work (such as a short oral or presentation). An assignment is generally understood as a more formally designed and assessed piece of work, usually structured into the formal assessment plan for the module and related to students’ eventual certification.

Other key concepts and ideas, specifically knowledge and ways of knowing, doing and being will be defined and discussed in the chapters as they are used. The term ways of knowing, doing and being has also been defined in this chapter (see Notes).

Notes

1. In South Africa, for example, this term usually refers to senior undergraduate or postgraduate students who assist lecturers by facilitating small group tutorials, or ‘tuts’ to complement or supplement lectures. In North America, this role might be called a Teaching Assistant, and in the UK it may refer to a postgraduate student or a lecturer, both of whom may take on this role.
2. This term will be used throughout the book to signal that all disciplines have knowledge that they consider core to the history, development and growth of the discipline. But how that knowledge comes to be known, debated, created and so on is also marked by particular practices and skills, by particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting, and is shared using particular textual, oral and visual formats. These are what this book refers to as ways of knowing, doing and being.
3. The LCT website (http://www.legitimationcodetheory.com) has a comprehensive set of papers, dissertations and research that use LCT to explore various aspects of teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum across the disciplines, from the natural sciences to the social science and Humanities.
4. A fourth dimension, Temporality, is under development and testing.

References


Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

1 I am using the term curriculum to encompass ‘what is taught, how it is taught and assessed, as well as who the teachers are, and who the students are’ (Quinn & Vorster, 2019, p. 13).

2 These terms are explained in Chapter 1 in detail, but to recap briefly, ‘ways of knowing, doing and being’ encompasses what might be termed skills, practices, literacies and dispositions or actions, and speaks to both explicit and tacit aspects of the disciplines that mark out their specific nature and character. This term references the work of James Paul Gee (2015), as my understanding of ways of being, in particular, is heavily influenced by his work.

Chapter 3

1 See P. Fara (2016), The lost women of Enlightenment science, New Scientist, https://www.newscientist.com/article/2090136-the-lost-women-of-enlightenment-science, and Western Civilization II Guides (2013), Women during the Enlightenment and their contributions,
In this instance we are referring specifically to rules of the game in a Bourdieusian sense, as the hidden rules that shape how universities function as arenas of struggle, who has power, why they have power, and how that power acts to structure and shape the arena and those within it. See Bourdieu speaking with Loïc Waquant for an accessible account of his thinking (Wacquant, 1989).


UCT Online (n.d.) 125 years of women on campus, https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2011-08-08-125-years-of-women-on-campus

Please see Curtis, Reid & Jones (2014); Garuba (2015); Lamb (2015); Menon, (2015); NUSConnect (2016); Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam (2019) for more details on the different debates in these contexts.

Maton has developed the EPD through extending Basil Bernstein’s pedagogic device (see Bernstein, 2000). Chapter 2 of Bernstein’s book, Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity could be a further resource here if you want to read deeper into the origins of this theoretical tool.

Here you may also use knowledge from the field of reproduction. As you can see in Figure 3.1, knowledge flows from the field of production towards the field of reproduction but also from the field of reproduction towards the field of production. We may use what we create and learn in the acts of teaching and evaluation to inform our choices in the field of recontextualization, as well as what has been created and shared in the field of production.

Field here is used quite specifically to refer to a broad set of practices that coalesce to create a distinctive ‘big D Discourse’ (Gee, 2015), with underpinning values, beliefs, ways of knowing, ways of doing, ways of being, and accepted bodies of knowledge. These will be contested, as not everyone who claims membership in the field will agree on what these are, but they offer a base from which to engage in the creation, sharing, and debating of what counts as knowledge, and who the knowers are. You could think, for example, of the field of economics, or the field of medicine, or the field of conservation biology. Access to the field for students is not direct but is mediated through the curriculum and attendant teaching of different disciplines or subjects.

Interested readers could read the work of Hanelie Adendorff, Margaret Blackie, Marnel Mouton and Ilse Rootman-Le Grange who have been working with LCT to decolonize and change biology and chemistry education in South Africa. There is also a panel discussion on decolonizing education that features inputs on doing this work from different disciplinary perspectives, including the sciences, featured on the LCT Centre’s YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK9eQ3Lk_9M

Chapter 4

To recap briefly from earlier chapters, Gee (2015) defines a big D Discourse as ways of speaking, reading, writing, thinking, valuing, believing and acting, all of which constitute a particular, socialized identity. This Discourse is what disciplinary teaching and learning needs to provide successful access to, as well as opportunities to acquire and master all of its particular aspects so students can join a disciplinary community of practice.

For a basic account of President Bolsonaro’s use of WhatsApp to spread disinformation ahead of the polls, read Luca Belli’s article in The Conversation and Mike Isaac and Kevin Roose’s piece in the New York Times, both in the reference list.

This definition is accessible here: https://www.lexico.com/definition/class.

Basic definitions offered by https://www.biologyonline.com/dictionary/class#:~:text=(2)%20A%20taxonomic%20group%20comprised,Mammalia%20belongs%20to%20phylum %20Chordata.
Genre is helpfully defined by Tardy (2011, p. 54) thus:

Genres are typified forms of discourse – that is, forms that arise when responses to a specific need or exigence become regularized. With repeated use, responses begin to conform to prior uses until the shape of these responses become expected by users. Genres, then, are recognizable by members of a social group. For example, scientific researchers may recognize conventional ways to report research findings, business people may recognize conventional ways of articulating a company’s mission and politicians may recognize conventional ways of delivering a campaign speech. Within each of these groups, we also find variations related to socio-rhetorical context: research reports, mission statements and campaign speeches are likely to be carried out differently depending on factors like academic discipline, workplace context or geographic region.

Chapter 5

1 Brenda Leibowitz’s paper offers an in-depth and nuanced look at different factors, including cultural and personal issues that influence or shape literacy practices.

2 This format refers to the ‘Introduction-Body-Conclusion’ form of essay writing that many standalone literacy or writing modules tend to use. It refers to creating a basic essay by having: an Introduction with background information, thesis statement and paper outline; three ‘Body’ paragraphs that each have topic and supporting sentences to develop ideas; and a Conclusion that restates the thesis and summarizes the main points in the Body. This can be a useful starting point, but many students are not shown how to adapt this basic form using disciplinary knowledge, language and forms of argumentation, which is what essay writing is really for. Many may get stuck in the basics without a clear sense of how to improve or move forward which limits their capacity to improve their learning and their results or marks.

3 If you would like to follow up with further reading on this issue of language and literacy, I can recommend two of the books in the reference list: Brian Street’s Social Literacies (2014) and Theresa Lillis’s Student Writing (2001). You could also search for David Barton and Mary Hamilton’s work, as well as the work of Cheryl Geisler, Hilary Janks and Shirley Brice Heath.

4 If you are interested in learning more, you could look at Eszter Szenes and Namali Tilakaratna’s work for examples from Business Studies and Social Work as well.

5 In brief, Utilitarianism argues that, in the face of moral and ethical dilemmas, the right ethical choice will produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The right action here is understood in terms of the consequences it will produce. See https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/ for a basic overview in more detail.

Chapter 6

1 You may note that I am enacting semantic gravity (SG) differently here than in previous chapters, such as Chapter 4. There, stronger semantic gravity (SG+) denoted a social context, such as case study examples or contexts of application. Here, SG+ is a symbolic context: a text that students have to create. Part of the value and strength of these LCT tools and concepts is their adaptability to and within different contexts and problems.


